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THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

NOVEMBER 1, 1867.

THE MUSIC OF THE ENGLISH CHURCH.

By G. A. MACFARREN.

(Continued from p. 120.)

To dismiss a comparative trifle before entering upon graver points of the subject, I hold it to be a radical mistake to sing the invariable portions of the Service—those habitually comprised under the definition “Musical Service”—to a chant. I hold this upon two grounds:—Firstly, because chanting is peculiar to the Psalms, which, by reason of their great length, would occupy undue time if sung to a continuous composition; and which by reason of their daily variation, require a flexible musical form that is easily adaptable to the unmetrical text. Secondly, because the antithetical form of Hebrew verse, which especially fits this for the Anglican form of chant, appears not in the Latin Canticles and Creed and the passages from the Greek Scriptures, translations of which constitute our Morning and Evening Services.

The interest that the chant derives from the ever varying text, which preserves to it elasticity and animation through its manifold repetitions, is utterly lost when the chant is sung to passages, which, from their daily recurrence, are more than familiar both to singers and to hearers. The tediousness of the chant in this inappropriate situation, is proved by the frequent attempts to lessen this through having several successive chants, instead of constantly repeating the same; and even to characterize the text by alternating graver and gayer chants according to the diversity of the sentiment. Fully, however, as these attempts prove it to be felt, they little relieve the tediousness against which they are directed; while they exemplify clerico-musical incompetency to balance means and end, where these are music and the effect it is to produce. In places where the Psalms of the day are chanted, the tediousness of the chant when applied to the canticles and hymns is cruelly exaggerated; not only because all interest, if not attention, must be exhausted by the repetition of the Psalms, for this most concise of all forms of composition, but also because the contrast is vexatiously obtruded of its fitness and unfitness to the one and the other situation.

If instances be needed of the unfitness here alleged, no one can question such as the following:—The singing three bars of the second strain of the chant to the word “praise,” and as much to the word “O,” in several passages of the *Te Deum*, as opposed to the reiteration of one note in the first strain of the chant to many syllables of the same verses that contain these unmeaningly protracted words. To withhold stronger expletives, which naturally arise and would better express my feeling, I may at least urge that such non-suiting as this of music to words induces false declamation, stifles devotional character, perverts in these two respects the entire purport of the performance, and is thus eminently injudicious.

My conviction is that the invariable portions of the Service should be sung to the most elaborate

compositions that are comprised in the music of the day's celebration. The extent of the elaboration should indeed be proportionate to the executive and the perceptive abilities of the persons assembled; but proportionate likewise to the simplicity or development of the other music of the day. Before proceeding with this view, let me say what is here implied by this word, elaborate. I mean not necessarily canonical or fugal, not necessarily complicated in part writing, not necessarily abundant in modulation, and not necessarily comprising chromatic or far-sought harmony. I mean embodying a poetically conceived, carefully matured, deeply studied reading of the text, and embodying this in a highly inspired, skilfully designed, musicianly wrought composition. The author's labour should first be to master his subject in every latent as much as every superficial aspect, and to penetrate the full bearing of every passage of his text; and, having obtained an insight into the innermost meaning of the words and its possible influence on the people who hear them, to apply all his best art resources to their expression, remembering that simplicity is the greatest resource and the grandest of which any artist can gain the command.

I am convinced that the inflexible portions of the Service should have musical ascendancy over the variable portions, be they called Anthem, or Introit, or Offertory, or what they may. These are my reasons. They comprise the texts which have been picked out from all others, as speaking best the faith, the hopes, the fears, the adoration, the gratitude, the love of heaven and of our own brotherhood, of those who worship. They are the Church's very language implanted in the thoughts, the hearts of her children. Other passages are of estimable merit, and have occasional or accidental use accordingly; but these have been especially chosen by the men who compiled our Liturgy from the best Greek and Latin Christian writings, and from the noblest Hebraic and Syriac compositions, as being more than anything else worthy of the situations wherein they occur, and wholly appropriate to them. Of still higher importance than the foregoing is it, that these texts, in consequence of their daily repetition, are familiar to every church-goer, who either knows them all by heart, or, if not this, knows the exact place in his book at which to find them for perusal. Intimately acquainted with the words, every listener is easily able to distinguish them in any complexity of treatment with which a composer may seek to illustrate their sense, and is easily able to comprehend the plenary development of such illustration, though this involve manifold repetition of some phrases of the text. Yet further, general attention needs some stimulant to fix it upon a subject of paramount familiarity, the proverbial offspring of which familiarity may else pervert the whole purpose of the Church's offices. Such a stimulant is the musician's comment, set forth in his universal and forcible tone language, upon the texts under consideration. It is eminently within the scope of such a comment to throw a stronger light than verbal explanation can cast upon the sentiment of the words—a light that, being reflected upon the hearers, brightens not their intelligence only—a light that penetrates, warms, and animates their feelings. Talk may assure one that such or such a sentence means so and so, and he may remain coolly indifferent in his assurance; the more eloquent

voice of music speaks not to him, but in him—stirs not his thoughts but his impulses—makes him not know but feel. Many sentences in the pieces comprised in our three services are, most happily, susceptible of several interpretations; or, better to speak, acceptations. Each of these is true to some special condition of the mind and heart, and all may be rendered through the medium of musical expression. The chain for the attention, which must be desirable if not indispensable in these pieces of invariable use, may be supplied, lightly by the charm of music, gravely by its deeper influence. The capability of this influence cannot be better, cannot be more truthfully described, than in the words of a minister of the English Church, who has a keen broad intellect and a comprehensive insight into art, and who said to me that he never thoroughly understood the Nicene Creed until he heard Beethoven's setting of it in the Mass in C. Let me recapitulate:—I. The texts of the changeless portions of the service are of chief significance; II. Congregations are fully conversant with them; III. Such conversancy enables an audience to follow with pleasure and with edification a complicated musical treatment of the texts in question; IV. Such complex music may serve to rivet the hearer's interest in the words and to enforce their meaning.

I am convinced that the Anthem, or any other flexible portions of the Service, should have secondary magnitude in extent and in elaboration to the fixed portions. These are my reasons. The text of these flexible pieces is for the most part strange to the auditory; in many instances the congregation neither hear the words, nor know in what particular place to find them; in others, where anthem books are in the hands of the majority of the assembly, and a minor canon proclaims—with showman-like separation of style and tone from that of the current performance—the number and page of the anthem, the utmost that an ordinary intellect can accomplish is to perceive the simplest sense of the words and to follow this through the simplest musical rendering. Attention needs no enchainment to the variable pieces; their variability, according either to the requirement of the occasion or to the fancy of the Precentor, gives them an ever new interest which cannot fail to attract the listener, and which only their too great length or too little merit can dissipate. The Elizabethan injunctions and all other authoritative references to these variable parts of the Service, distinctly imply that they are to be clear in character and concise in construction. It was manifestly designed that they should form a relief to the severe strain upon the faculties, active and passive, which is made by the fixed pieces in the Service of the day. The people's wish gives obvious warrant to this design; since, in countless churches, the hymn tune takes place of all other compositions in the situations appropriate to variable pieces, and in other churches, the use of hymn tunes is added to that of more extended compositions where this latter prevails; whence it may be seen that the relief is demanded of brief emphatic pieces of music, and that, where these form not the staple of the programme they form an addition to the same.

In the present advanced state of musical art, it is necessary that the largest, the grandest art forms be applied to Church purposes. General education befits public intelligence for the perception of extended design and elaborated detail. It is incom-

patible with the magnificence of our Church Service and of the buildings wherein this is celebrated, that its musical element should be of less than the most aspiring character, and that there should not be some sections of the ceremonial for which the producing artist wrought his utmost. The artist's conceptions should be quickened by the occasion and the theme whereon he laboured; his highest thoughts should thus be exercised upon any and every thing he produced for ecclesiastical use; his highest skill is especially proper to those compositions which have the chief importance in the ritual, its exercise upon which is especially perceptible by the community. The practice is preposterous of sometimes performing an anthem of from fifteen to twenty minutes in length, or more, the text of which is compiled of remote unconnected verses of a Psalm, or of passages from several books in the Old and New Testaments, and the words of which exact endless leaf-turning for their discovery; and of objecting, in the same church, to the performance of a *Te Deum* that occupies less than a quarter of an hour. An earnest auditory would follow this latter, were the composition worthy of the subject, with sympathetic interest and with rapt attention, forgetful of their standing attitude in the lofty sentiments it would awaken, and in the clear—perhaps new to them—perception of the verbal sense it would induce. The same auditory would hear the former with the critical curiosity of visitors at a concert, rustling their book leaves to find what words were being sung, scrutinising the merit of the performance, and lounging in all possible ingenious attitudes to elude the personal fatigue that doubled itself with every succeeding minute, and aggravated the inevitable mental weariness. The *Te Deum* is the finest, the most comprehensive, the most thoroughly Christian hymn in the entire Church Service; the other fixed pieces are, in proportion to their length, of proportionate excellence. It is then, I repeat, truly preposterous to require that these grand texts should be hurried over with at most an indication, a hint at verbal expression, endlessly short of an attempt to do justice to the same; and in churches where this requisition prevails, to admit the execution of those prolix pieces of prettiness which keep the people perpendicular while the minute hand may pass one-third round the dial, and which, if they amuse, can rarely edify the hearers.

Of Marbecke's adaptation of the Ambrosian or Gregorian melodies to Cranmer's English version of the Canticles and other invariable pieces, I have little to say. It was made in the brief period of transition from Romanism to Anglicism, while people had still in their hands the Primer of Henry VIII., and were still familiar with, if not in practice of its use. Herein is an advice from the Bishop who edited the book, to the effect that one may at option read either the English or the Latin version of the text; and this musical adaptation is equally a compromise between the old prejudices and the new convictions of the time. The adaptation was made while the policy of the Church was to assimilate, as nearly as might be, the new form of the Service to the old, so as to avoid reversing the life-long habits of the worshippers; and to conciliate those who accepted with difficulty the innovations upon usages which they yet revered. It was made when no English music had been set to the English words, and it was sung in churches

when there was nothing else to sing. I should but repeat what I have already confessed, were I to enlarge on the musical merit or the ritualistic fitness of these melodies to the English Church in the present age; if, as is pretended, some persons truly enjoy them, I marvel at their taste, and I think that they would do better for public culture and for devotional advancement, were they to seek the indulgence of such taste elsewhere than in church.

Of the collection of settings of the Service published by Day, in 1564—prior, it should seem, to Tallis' harmonization of the Plain Song, and his original composition of music to the longer pieces—one thing significant is to be remarked. The date of their publication, and the strong probability that they had then been some time in use in one or more churches, show that there was, immediately after the issue of Marbecke's adaptation, an endeavour to supersede this by something of artistic pretension; show that the bald melodies arranged by the pious organist of Windsor were distasteful to the very first generation of their hearers; show that these were out of date while yet their English form was new; and that from the very first they were in this form antipathetic to members of the English Reformed Church. A future age will scarcely credit that, in our nineteenth century days of common sense and assumed art progress, men of honest purpose and of great intelligence go about to revive the use of certain portions of Marbecke's adaptation—other portions are too crude for even them to bring forward; and thus to force upon the toleration of modern musically cultivated congregations, music from which the people sought an escape three hundred years ago. The settings of the Service which show the early disrelish of the unisonous singing of Gregorian melodies to English words, are counterpoints upon these same melodies—the Canto Fermo standing always, according to the custom of the time which I have repeatedly noticed, in the tenor part. They are by several musicians of good esteem in their time, but whose names are now known only to the antiquary. The music is valuable as historical evidence of the instantaneous impulse to art progress that was given by the Reformation, and as historical evidence of the pristine attempts to give higher musical interest to the service than Marbecke's adaptation possesses; as music, it is an interesting specimen of the state of the art at the time.

Dating from Marbecke—dating, that is from the establishment of the Reformation—the music of the Service represents the musical history of the country. The unaccompanied Gregorian melodies of the Roman Church were at once superseded by contrapuntal settings of or elaborations upon the same. These were early followed by the original music of Tallis and Byrd, which is written according to the ecclesiastical modes, since these constituted the only musical system then taught. The one generally known Service of Gibbons displays a remarkable advance in the feeling for tonality and in contrapuntal freedom; and this is a bright example of the progress of the age. The Services written after the Restoration almost immediately show a foreboding, may I call it, of the chromatic element which distinguishes the modern style; but this employed with such careful reserve that we perceive how delicate ground the composers felt it to be—how their every step upon it was experimental—and how they thought it available only for points of extreme

expression. Handel but followed in the path of Purcell in giving to his Festival Services the florid character which music had then assumed, and the men who came with and next after him, joined with this as he did those harmonic freedoms—such as the second inversion of the tonic concord, and the unprepared chord of the dominant seventh with its first and third inversions—that were new to the time. In the Services of Boyce and his successors is to be traced the glee style which, happily for music, is peculiar to this country, and, happily for this country, is peculiar to that too-long period of after-dinner music which now, I trust, has completed its cycle. Attwood's Services present much of the prettiness, some of the charm, but none of the grandeur, the deep expression, the great beauty of Mozart. The Service from his time till now—a-days has grown more and more chromatic; but it is emerging higher and higher from the mawkish imbecility that characterizes the sleekly subservient physiognomy of the preceding age. Thus, from generation to generation, the Services of each age exhibit the peculiarities of the time and the capabilities of the composers to apply them.

Church music—even this, the most exclusively ecclesiastical division of Church music—has never been separated in style from the secular music of the period in which it has been written; and it has only been distinguished in character, in the same manner as music set to secular poetry on more or less earnest or trivial subjects has been distinguished by greater gravity or lightness of expression. Thus, to adduce modern forms, the writer of a sentimental opera aims at a loftier character than he who spends his thoughts upon a comic opera; a heroic opera rises above that in expression; a tragic opera soars still beyond this; an oratorio surpasses in dignity all theatrical forms; and a Church Service exacts a deeper, more solemn, course of ideas—one more nearly approximating sublimity than even other classes of sacred composition. So we may note that the lute songs, the part songs, the madrigals, and the sacred music of the sixteenth century, all exemplify the same technical resources, all illustrate the same style; and that they may be distinguished only in character by the sentiment they embody. The same unity of style prevails among all classes of music in each succeeding age. While, however, in all theoretical essentials Church music has ever been identical in style with the contemporaneous compositions for the theatre and the chamber, Church composers have, as a strange manifestation of orthodoxy, held fast by the notation of the time of Elizabeth, in spite of the improvements this has undergone, and in spite of the inconvenience—not to say difficulty—induced in performance by the discrepancy between this and the notation of the current time. So, let me say with courtesy to the worthies of past times and present, who seemingly have made it a point of piety to write services and psalm tunes in the obsolete characters of an elder period, savours more of affectation than of the sincerity which I know many of them to possess. What can be the reason which chains such admirable musicians and excellent men to so cumbrous a custom? Can it be that the white notes, the semibreves and minims, have an aspect of sanctity resultant from their likeness to the appearance of the suppurated choristers? If yes, just so sanctified look also the jig tunes and those of the lightest, nay, the profanest ballads of

the days of our last Tudor and our first Stuart rulers, which have the same vestiture of whiteness, how impure soever they may be at the core. Can it be that they conceive this practice of making the breve instead of the semibreve the standard for measuring the divisions of a bar, though never till now peculiar to Church writers, has been or is unexceptionably followed in Church music? If yes, how grossly do they ignore the countless appropriations from oratorios and other works for anthems, and the original compositions of Handel for the Church; not to say the anthems themselves have written, many of which stand in the notation that is familiar to every musical eye, and is proportionably facile of comprehension. Can it be that they wish to associate with the Church Service for ever, the idea of the triumphantly bemadrigalled virgin, in whose reign round notes and the Church of England both were established? If yes, they should recollect that her Majesty of pious memory danced to galliard tunes, written in this notation, to display her well-formed legs to the French Ambassadors, who were thereby sorely scandalized. Can it be that they would commemorate the initiation of religious Reform by preserving to the Church the musical notation proper to its era? If yes, they should consistently hold by the diamond and lozenge notes, and by the staff of four lines that were then in use; since the round notes, white and black, belong to a later stage of the Church's and the Art's development. In sober earnest, I can find no reasonable justification of this apparently pragmatical tenacity to a point comparatively immaterial; of which, its misleading inconvenience is the thing most noticeable, since even the permanence in the Church of this method of writing music is not without exception, Handel having in his Services employed quavers and semiquavers, and the first published chants being noted in characters of half the length of those now used for the same pieces.

(To be continued.)

THE publication of "Mendelssohn's Letters" has undoubtedly thrown an additional interest around his music. In many of his compositions those pure and genial thoughts so vividly expressed in his correspondence are clearly traceable; and we can often picture to ourselves, by the date of a letter, the precise state of mind which influenced him in the creation of a work. When the letters of Beethoven were afterwards given to the world something more than a mere curiosity was gratified; for the conventional Beethoven was annihilated at once and for ever. The morose and untamed recluse, who was popularly supposed to have scared everybody from his presence, was at length placed before the world in his true light. The irritability which would naturally arise from his incurable deafness is even admitted by himself in many of his confidential communications; but the manner in which he fulfilled the self-imposed office of guardian to his nephew is sufficient to show how he longed to have some one to love—some one who could occasionally draw him from the world of art, and share with him the joys and sorrows of his everyday life. Again in the letters of Mozart, how perfectly does the man, with all his virtues, and all his failings, stand before us; how thoroughly are all the disgraceful intrigues of the petty German courts reproduced, and how heartily do we sympathize with a man who was compelled to do battle with those who,

although placed so far above him in position, were so immeasurably below him in intellect. It may reasonably be imagined that the public, having enjoyed the privilege of communing with the minds of such men in their holiday moments, would scarcely rest contented until something more was known of the many other popular composers who had hitherto spoken to the world only through their works. The indefatigable Ludwig Nohl has once more set himself the task of supplying this want; and Lady Wallace has, with equal zeal, translated the correspondence thus collected into English. The result is an agreeable volume, called "Letters of Distinguished Musicians," recently published by Messrs. Longmans, a firm to which the thanks of all English artists are assuredly due, not only for the collections of letters by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Mozart, but for that delightful autobiography of Spohr, a work which cannot be too highly estimated as a mental photograph of that accomplished composer. The volume before us contains letters by Gluck, Haydn, Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, Weber, and Mendelssohn. Of these undoubtedly the most interesting, as having any direct bearing upon art, are those of the great reformer Gluck, whilst to those who love to linger over the correspondence of such cultivated musicians as Haydn, Weber, and Mendelssohn, the letters here given (most of which are addressed to their intimate friends), will prove of inestimable value. The autobiography of Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, will be also read with much pleasure by the admirers of this earnest and enthusiastic pianist.

We can make but few extracts from this volume; but a quotation from a letter in which Gluck unfolds his theory of the principles which should regulate the composition of operatic music (written in Italian to the Grand Duke Leopold, of Tuscany,) is too valuable to be passed over:—

When I undertook (he says) to compose music for *Alceste*, I proposed entirely to abolish all those abuses introduced by the injudicious vanity of singers, or by the excessive complaisance of masters, which have so long disfigured the Italian opera, and instead of the most splendid and beautiful of all entertainments, thus rendering it the most ridiculous and tiresome. My purpose was to restrict music to its true office—that of ministering to the expression of the poetry and to the situations of the plot, without interrupting the action, or chilling it by superfluous and needless ornamentation. I thought that it should accomplish what brilliancy of colour and a skillfully adapted contrast of light and shade effect for a correct and well-designed drawing, by animating the figures without distorting their contours. I wished, therefore, to avoid arresting an actor in the most excited moment of his dialogue, by causing him to wait for a tiresome *ritournelle*, or, in the midst of half uttered words, to detain him on a favourable note, either for the purpose of displaying his fine voice and flexibility in some long passage, or causing him to pause till the orchestra gave him time to take breath for a cadence. It did not appear to me that I ought to hurry rapidly over the second part of an aria, possibly the most impassioned and important of all, in order to have the opportunity of repeating regularly four times over the words of the first part, causing the aria to end where in all probability the sense did not end, merely for the convenience of the singer, and to enable him to vary a passage according to his caprice; in short, I have striven to banish the abuses against which reason and good sense have so long protested in vain. My idea was that the overture should prepare the spectators for the plot to be represented, and give some indication of its nature; that the concerted instruments ought to be regulated according to the interest and passion of the drama, and not leave a void in the dialogue between the air and the recitative, so that the meaning of a passage might not be perverted, nor the force and warmth of the action improperly interrupted. Further, I thought that my most strenuous efforts must be directed in search of a noble simplicity, thus avoiding a parade of difficulty at the expense of clearness. I did not consider a mere display of novelty valuable, unless naturally suggested by the situation and the expression; and on this point no rule in composition exists that I would not have gladly sacrificed in favour of the effect produced.

That this conscientious composer was equally earnest in carrying out his theoretical convictions to a practical result may be gathered from the following